



Amarillo  
VA Health Care System

# HealthTrends

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## Regular screening can save your life

by Sheree Keil, R.N.

**C**olorectal cancer is the third leading cause of cancer death in the United States. More than 145,000 new cases are diagnosed and more than 56,000 people die from colorectal cancer each year.

The exact causes of colorectal cancer are not known. However, studies show that certain factors increase a person's chance of developing colorectal cancer, including age, ethnicity and a family history of the disease.

Although the disease can occur at any age, most people who develop colorectal cancer are over age 50.

Colorectal cancer is a disease in which cells in the colon or rectum become abnormal and divide without control or order, forming a mass called a tumor. Cancer cells invade the tumor and destroy the tissue around them. They can also break away from the tumor and spread to form new tumors in other parts of the body.

Researchers suggest that 90 percent of all colorectal cancer cases and deaths can be avoided. And with regular screenings, most cases can be treated before they become cancerous. Here are four ways to screen for colorectal cancer:

**A digital rectal exam.** For this exam, your health-care provider will feel the inside of your rectum with a gloved finger for growths. This exam has limited value because your provider can check only the rectum and not the colon. Most colorectal cancers are in the colon.

**A fecal occult blood test.** This test checks for blood in the stool. It is a relatively easy and inexpensive test. However, many factors can interfere with its accuracy. Also, blood can be present for reasons other than colorectal cancer, such as hemorrhoids. Tests



that show traces of blood need to be followed by more specific tests. Eating certain substances before this test may lead to inaccurate results. For two days before having your stool tested, avoid eating turnips, horseradish and red meat. Don't take vitamin C and iron supplements or medicines that can irritate the stomach, such as aspirin.

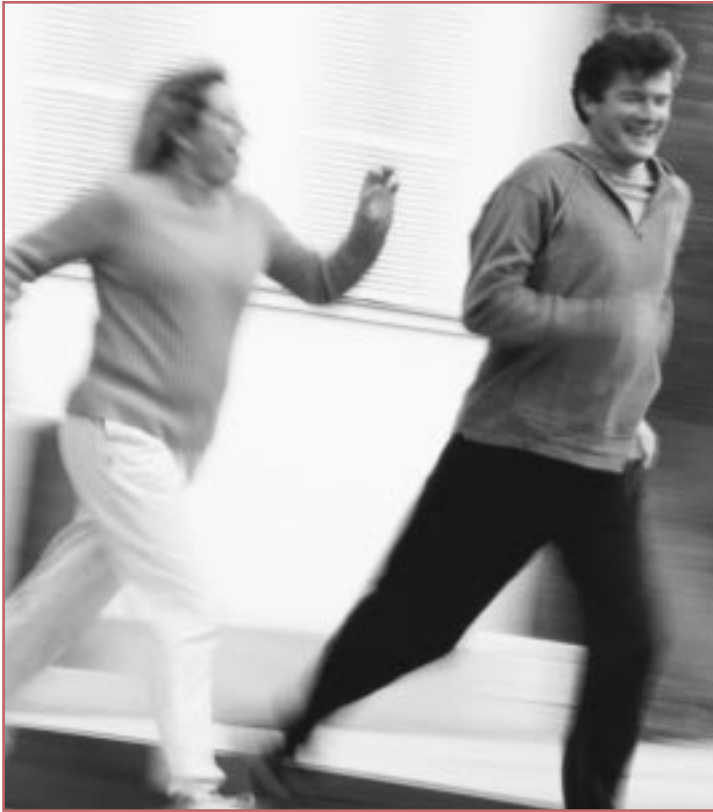
### **A flexible sigmoidoscopy.**

During this procedure the doctor inserts a slim, flexible, lighted tool called a sigmoidoscope into your rectum. The doctor looks at the lower part of your colon with the scope. He or she can also use this tool to get samples of tissue for lab tests. About half of all colorectal cancers or polyps can be seen with this exam.

**A colonoscopy.** After giving you a sedative to minimize your discomfort, the doctor inserts a slim, flexible, lighted tool called a colonoscope into your rectum. This tool is longer than the sigmoidoscope. With it the doctor can see most of the colon and check for polyps and cancer.

If a sigmoidoscopy or colonoscopy finds an abnormal area in the rectum or colon, the doctor can use the scope to remove a sample of tissue from the area for lab tests (a biopsy). Sometimes the entire abnormal area can be removed with the scope.

Colorectal cancer can be fatal, but it is treatable and can be overcome if caught early. If your nurse or primary care provider gives you stool cards, it is important to complete the tests and return them in the mail. If your provider feels you are better suited to be screened by a scope, you should carefully follow the pre-procedure instructions, so that accurate results can be obtained.



## Avoid seasonal weight gain

**T**his time of year, unpleasant weather conditions too often provide the perfect excuse for avoiding exercise. But if you want to lose weight or survive the season without adding any extra pounds, it is crucial to be physically active. The good news is that it is easier than you might think to increase your physical activity, even in imperfect weather.

The easiest way to become more physically active is to make some form of activity a part of your daily routine. Physical activity doesn't have to mean formal exercise such as calisthenics, aerobics or other activities that require special equipment or training.

Many activities you do every day burn calories. For example, the average person (approximately 150 pounds) burns about 100 calories for one hour of housework or 300 calories for one hour of raking leaves or strenuous gardening.

You can use the following tips year round to

help integrate physical activity into your daily routine:

### Walk

The average person burns approximately 100 calories per mile whether walking or jogging.

- Use your local mall as an indoor track. One hour of walking through a mall without stopping to browse or shop can burn 300 calories.

- Park your car at the farthest end of the lot to burn more calories as you walk to the entrance.

- Get off the bus a few stops early and walk the extra distance.

- At home or at work, try to walk briskly for 10 minutes out and 10 minutes back twice a day. The average person would lose approximately 31 pounds, or maintain a 31-pound weight loss if this was the only additional activity he or she did.

### Climb stairs

Stair climbing is one of the highest calorie-burning activities. Ten minutes of climbing stairs burns two to three times as many calories as 10 minutes of walking. Take the stairs instead of the elevator whenever possible.

Start by climbing a few flights and gradually increasing the number. Since the average person burns one calorie every five steps, you could burn hundreds of calories a week before you know it.

### Be active at home

- **Put some muscle into your housework.** Scrub, vacuum and wash windows with vigor for an energy expenditure that gets your home sparkling and your heart pumping.
- **Tend your garden.** Try your hand at gardening and landscaping. Plant tomatoes, mow the lawn, pull up shrubs that have seen better days and replace with new ones.
- **Go ahead, watch TV!** Just keep moving while you watch. Walk or march in place. Jump rope or climb stairs during a commercial break.
- **Do a home beautification project.** Scrape away old paint and add a fresh coat. Sand and revarnish tired-looking furniture. Try hanging wallpaper yourself.

# Choose to enjoy the holidays

**A**t holiday time, try to remember that enjoyment is a choice. Of those who enjoy the holidays, most have learned to make the best of the holidays as they happen, in spite of their plans. Following is a list of tips that can help you enjoy the holidays.

- Remember, there is no such thing as a perfect holiday.
- Start by being good to yourself. Be as good to yourself as you are to others. Do what you like and enjoy.
- Take some time each day for yourself. Enjoy a bubble bath. Read something just for fun. Take a quiet walk or listen to your favorite music.

- Nourish your spiritual nature during the holidays.
- Work at communicating with your loved ones. No one can be a mind reader.
- Keep up your healthy lifestyle—eat nutritious meals and limit the “goodies,” caffeine and alcohol.

- Take breaks from the holiday festivities. You don’t have to attend every party.
- Practice time management. Prioritize your list of things to do. Then you’ll feel good that the really important things can be accomplished.
- Include others. Let your spouse, children and friends help with holiday preparations.
- Take time out for laughter.
- Escape for a moment to a pleasant memory of holidays past.

## Take time to relax

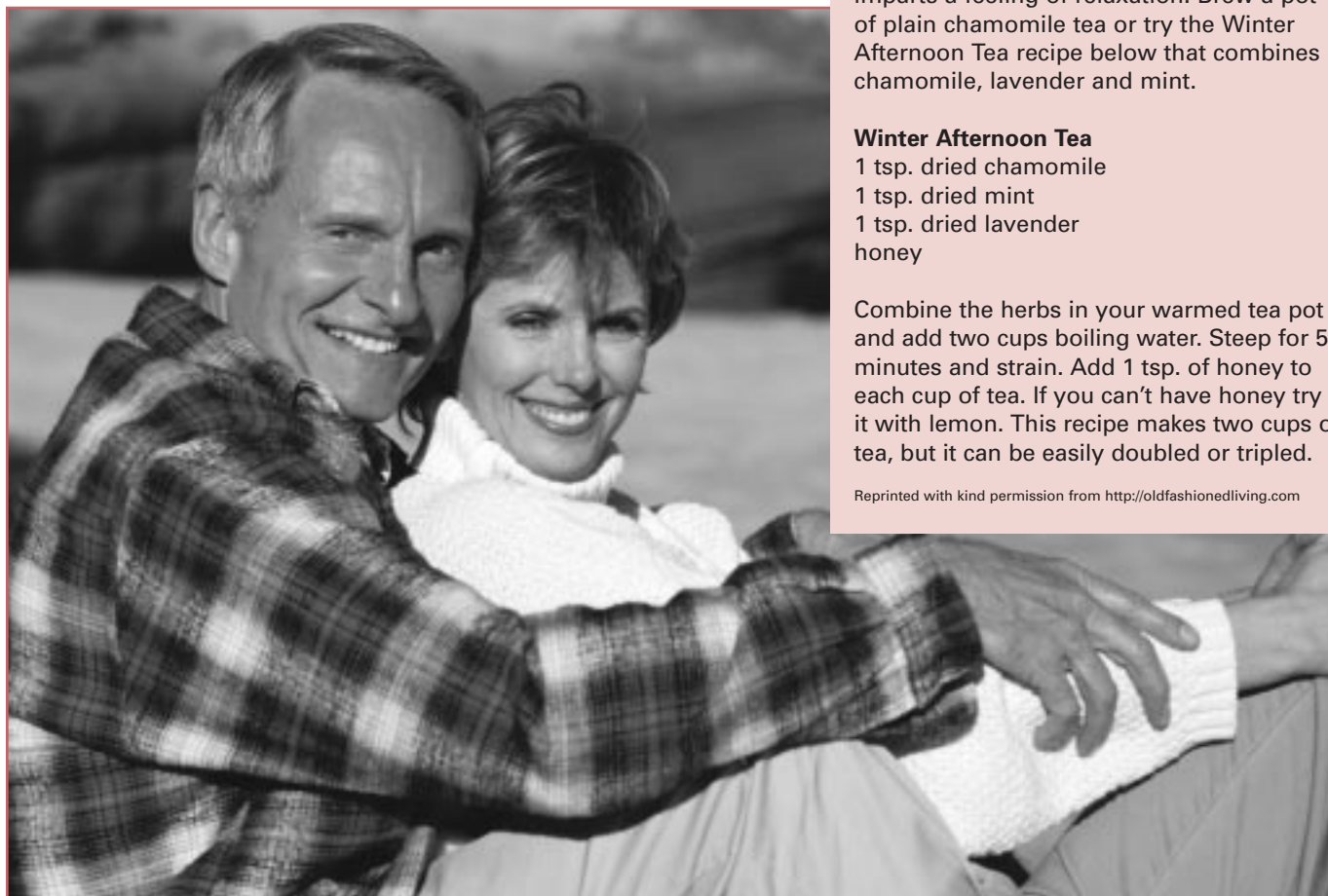
Brew a pot of herbal tea for a relaxing break. Chamomile is a natural herb that imparts a feeling of relaxation. Brew a pot of plain chamomile tea or try the Winter Afternoon Tea recipe below that combines chamomile, lavender and mint.

### Winter Afternoon Tea

1 tsp. dried chamomile  
1 tsp. dried mint  
1 tsp. dried lavender  
honey

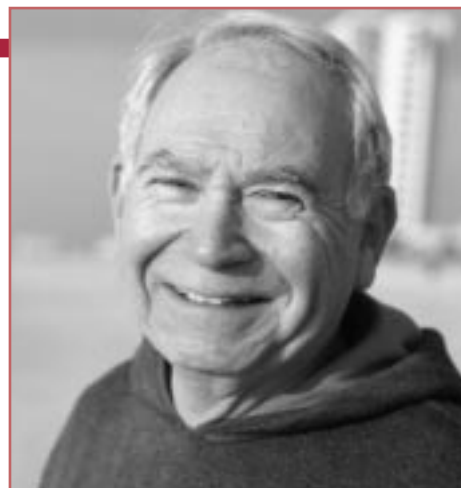
Combine the herbs in your warmed tea pot and add two cups boiling water. Steep for 5 minutes and strain. Add 1 tsp. of honey to each cup of tea. If you can’t have honey try it with lemon. This recipe makes two cups of tea, but it can be easily doubled or tripled.

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# You can quit smoking

## Five common myths about quitting smoking



### MYTH #1 Smoking is just a bad habit.

**Fact:** Tobacco use is an addiction. According to the U.S. Public Health Service Clinical Practice Guideline, *Treating Tobacco Use and Dependence*, nicotine is a very addictive drug. For some people, it can be as addictive as heroin or cocaine.

### MYTH #2 Quitting is just a matter of willpower.

**Fact:** Because smoking is an addiction, quitting is often very difficult. A number of treatments are available that can help.



### For more information

To get a free copy of other consumer products on quitting smoking, call any of the following toll-free numbers:

- Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, **800-358-9295**
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, **800-CDC-1311**
- National Cancer Institute, **800-4-CANCER**
- You can also log onto the Surgeon General's Web site at [www.surgeongeneral.gov/tobacco](http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/tobacco).

### MYTH #3 If you can't quit the first time you try, you will never be able to quit.

**Fact:** Quitting is hard. Usually, people make two or three tries, or more, before being able to quit for good.

### MYTH #4 The best way to quit is "cold turkey."

**Fact:** The most effective way to quit smoking is by using a combination of counseling and nicotine replacement therapy (such as the nicotine patch, inhaler, gum or nasal spray) or non-nicotine medicines (such as bupropion SR). Your healthcare provider or smoking cessation clinic is the best place to go for help with quitting.

### MYTH #5 Quitting is expensive.

**Fact:** Treatments cost from \$3 to \$10 a day. A pack-a-day smoker spends almost \$1,000 a year. VA Medical Centers offer smoking cessation resources as well as counseling.

Visit our Web site to get information on health and medication questions at  
[http://www.va.gov/visn18/HI/Health\\_Informatics.htm](http://www.va.gov/visn18/HI/Health_Informatics.htm)

*Health Trends* is designed to provide general health and wellness information and news about services provided by VISN 18. *Health Trends* is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, which should be obtained from your healthcare provider.

Tobacco Use Cessation classes are offered in Amarillo and Lubbock. You can refer yourself or ask your provider for a referral. In Amarillo dial (806) 355-9703 to contact April McCarty at ext. 4100; Cynthia Jackson at ext. 4601; Jamie Adams at ext. 4400; Shirley Loe at ext. 7680; or Vance Pearson at ext. 7960. In Lubbock, dial (806) 796-7900 to contact Becky Haskitt at ext. 7945 or Janice Putman at ext. 7929.

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